



# THE BOUNDARY MARKER

The newsletter of the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission

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## CLEAN RIVERS PROGRAM RELEASES REPORT ON RIO GRANDE WATER QUALITY

The U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has released a report on Rio Grande water quality. Prepared by the USIBWC's Texas Clean Rivers Program for the Rio Grande, the report, "2003 Regional Assessment of Water Quality in the Rio Grande Basin," includes an overview of five years of data from the Texas portion of the basin.

In general, the main water quality concerns in the basin are salinity, bacteria, and nutrients. Salinity is often associated with agricultural return drains, natural sources, and low flow conditions.

Bacteria and nutrients, common concerns downstream of urban areas, are often the result of wastewater discharges. In addition to identifying standard water quality concerns, the report noted excessive growth of aquatic weeds and low flow in the Lower Rio Grande.

The USIBWC, which operates the Clean Rivers Program (CRP) under contract with the State of Texas, has ten partners that help collect samples at 68 stations on the Rio Grande and 12 stations on the Pecos River. Following strict quality assurance

protocols, the partners sample for such parameters as fecal coliform, metals, and dissolved oxygen (an indicator of suitability for aquatic life). Partners include academic institutions, municipalities, and USIBWC field offices, among others.

The data are analyzed to determine if the river

meets water quality standards for each segment's designated uses, including suitability for aquatic life, contact recreation, public water supply, and fish consumption. The study found that the standards for contact recreation were exceeded in various segments of the Rio Grande due to high levels of fecal coliform bacteria, meaning it is not safe to swim



*CRP staff and partners on the Rio Grande at Lajitas, Texas*

in some parts of the river.

The report is available online at [www.ibwc.state.gov/CRP/2003\\_Rio\\_Grande\\_Assessment.pdf](http://www.ibwc.state.gov/CRP/2003_Rio_Grande_Assessment.pdf) so that members of the public can access detailed information about water quality in specific parts of the basin. The CRP also conducts periodic public meetings to get input from basin residents about water quality concerns and to develop recommendations for future study.



### MINUTE ASSURES CONVEYANCE OF CONSERVED WATER TO THE RIO GRANDE

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC), in July reached agreement to assure the transfer of conserved water from the Conchos River in Mexico to the Rio Grande. The agreement, Minute 309, provides for conveyance to the Rio Grande of water made available from conservation projects in Mexican irrigation districts in the State of Chihuahua.

Min. 309 satisfies the requirements of an earlier agreement, Min. 308, signed in 2002, which called upon the IBWC to provide observations with respect to the estimated volumes of water saved by the Mexican conservation projects and identify measures to ensure the conveyance of the saved waters to the Rio Grande.

As noted in Min. 309, once the conservation projects are completed in 2006, an additional estimated volume of 321,043 acre-feet will be conveyed to the Rio Grande annually. While the projects are being constructed, less water will be transferred. Completion of the projects is contingent upon the availability of funds. Releases of the conserved volumes from Mexican dams on the Conchos River will begin in January of each year, starting in 2004.

Under the 1944 Water Treaty, water arriving in the Rio Grande from the Conchos River is allotted two-thirds to Mexico and one-third to the United States, resulting in an estimated volume to the United States of 107,014 acre-feet annually from these conserved waters upon completion. The actual volume conveyed to the Rio Grande will vary depending on rainfall, storage, and irrigation releases in the Conchos Basin. The conserved water allotted to the United States is in addition to water allotted to the U.S. from other Mexican sources, including other volumes from the Conchos River.

The agreement also provides for IBWC field inspections to view construction and progress of works, verify the efficiencies and savings obtained, and observe the measures necessary to ensure conveyance of the saved volumes to the Rio Grande. Conservation projects being constructed include lining of canals, rehabilitation of pumping equipment, implementation of drip irrigation, and installation of pipes. Gaging stations will also be installed to monitor the volumes saved.

The total investment contemplated for the Mex-

ican conservation projects is approximately 149 million dollars, of which 40 million dollars is being funded by the North American Development Bank's (NADB) Water Conservation Investment Fund. The funding comes from NADB's retained earnings on monies deposited by the Government of Mexico. If additional funding for the Mexican projects is not allocated, the estimated 321,043 acre-feet in water savings by year four

may be reduced. In addition to the Mexican projects, NADB is investing an amount of up to \$40 million in conservation projects in the U.S.

Making additional water available to the United States from water saved in Mexico is expected to enhance Mexico's ability to deliver required volumes to the U.S. Under the 1944 Water Treaty, Mexico is to deliver to the U.S. a minimum annual average volume of 350,000 acre-feet of water from six Mexican tributaries to the Rio Grande. Since 1992, Mexico has incurred a deficit of 1.4 million acre-feet in deliveries.

To view the full text of the minute, go to [www.ibwc.state.gov/Files/Minutes/Min309.pdf](http://www.ibwc.state.gov/Files/Minutes/Min309.pdf).



*Min. 309 signing (l to r) U.S. Commissioner Carlos M. Ramirez, Mexican Com. J. Arturo Herrera Solís, U.S. Deputy Com. Carlos Marin, U.S. Secretary Carlos Peña, Mexican Secretary Jesús Luévano Grano*



## RIO GRANDE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES UNDERWAY

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) is nearing completion of two Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for Commission projects on the Rio Grande. The studies will help guide the agency as it makes decisions about future management of the projects.

The Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project EIS covers 158 miles along the river from Penitas to just downstream of Brownsville, Texas. The purpose of the EIS is to present and analyze the impacts of current and proposed USIBWC vegetation management activities within the United States portions of the project. Pursuant to long-standing agreements with Mexico, both the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the International Boundary and Water Commission mow and remove vegetation along the Rio Grande in order to maintain the river's capacity to convey flood flows. In addition to fulfilling its agreements with Mexico, the USIBWC must fulfill commitments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reduce potential impacts to endangered species.

The Draft EIS, which was released in July, analyzes four alternatives for vegetation management ranging from no mowing to vegetation maintenance on more

than 1,000 acres. The preferred alternative would continue current practices, with vegetation control on nearly 300 acres. The agency expects to announce its final selection of an alternative before year's end.

The Canalization Project Draft EIS, expected in December, looks at just over 100 miles of the Rio Grande from Percha Dam, New Mexico to El Paso, Texas. In this area, the USIBWC maintains a system of flood control levees while ensuring the delivery of Rio Grande water to Mexico in accordance with a 1906 treaty. The EIS includes alternatives that would enhance the environmental quality of the project while preserving its functionality in terms of water delivery and flood control. The report identifies various sites for potential environmental enhancements. Coupled with needed improvements to the Canalization Project flood control levees, the proposed enhancements would provide for an environmentally improved river system while ensuring water deliveries and avoiding increased flood risk.

For more information about both environmental documents, consult *What's New* at the USIBWC web page, [www.ibwc.state.gov](http://www.ibwc.state.gov).

## PROJECT TO REDUCE POLLUTION IN THE NEW RIVER

The Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) Board of Directors is scheduled to vote in late September on the Mexicali II sanitation project. The project, which includes construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Mexicali, Baja California, will improve water quality in the New River. Currently, untreated wastewater from Mexicali enters the New River and flows north to Imperial County, California, posing a health risk for residents on both sides of the border.

The International Boundary and Water Commission has worked with a Binational Technical Committee to develop the Mexicali II project. Members of the public attending the August meeting of the USIBWC's Colorado River Citizens' Forum in Calexico, California were briefed on the project by Doug Liden, an environmental engineer with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The project is funded in part through a grant from the EPA's Border Environment Infrastructure Fund. Construction of the wastewater treatment plant, located 20 miles south of the border, is scheduled to be completed in June of 2005. The plant's 20 million gallon

per day capacity is designed to meet the area's needs through 2014. In addition to construction of the wastewater treatment plant, the project includes construction of a pumping plant and installation of a pipeline to convey the sewage.



*Wastewater discharge in Mexicali*



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